

HEALTH

Passport 55 Program To Focus On Heart Healthy Eating Tips

The community is invited to learn more about heart healthy eating habits this Thursday, Feb. 15, at Roby Fitzgerald Adult Center.

The program, which is part of the Passport 55 health education series, will be presented at 10 a.m. at the senior center, located at 203 N. College St.

There is no charge to attend. The public is welcome.

Guest speaker will be Ashley Self, registered dietitian with Laughlin Memorial Hospital.

The topic of her talk will be "Meal Prepping for a Healthy Heart."

Attendees will receive important educational information about healthy eating habits and will learn about how to properly read nutritional labels on food products, which is important when considering weekly menu planning and making grocery lists to promote healthful eating.

Light refreshments will be provided.

The program is being presented by the Ballad Health Foundation (formerly the Laughlin Health Care Foundation) in cooperation with Roby Adult Center.

For additional information, contact the Ballad Health Foundation's Greeneville location at 423-787-5117.



Laughlin Memorial Hospital registered dietitian Ashley Self will present heart healthy eating tips at this month's Passport 55 program. The public is invited to attend this free health talk, which is set for Thursday, Feb. 15, at 10 a.m. at Roby Fitzgerald Adult Center.

PHOTO SPECIAL TO THE SUN

Can Music Heal You? Programs Aim To Answer The Question

BY LAURAN NEERGAAR
ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON (AP) — Like a friendly Pied Piper, the violinist keeps up a toe-tapping beat as dancers weave through busy hospital hallways and into the chemotherapy unit, patients looking up in surprised delight. Upstairs, a cellist plays an Irish folk tune for a patient in intensive care.

Music increasingly is becoming a part of patient care — although it's still pretty unusual to see roving performers captivating entire wards, like at MedStar Georgetown University Hospital one fall morning.

"It takes them away for just a few minutes to some other place where they don't have to think about what's going on," said cellist Martha Vance after playing for a patient isolated to avoid spreading infection.

The challenge: Harnessing music to do more than comfort the sick. Now, moving beyond programs like Georgetown's, the National Institutes of Health is bringing together musicians, music therapists and neuroscientists to tap into the brain's circuitry and figure out how.

"The brain is able to compensate for other deficits sometimes by using music to communicate," said NIH Director Dr. Francis Collins, a geneticist who also plays a mean guitar.

To turn that ability into a successful therapy, "it would be a really good thing to know which parts of the brain are still intact to be called into action. To know the circuits well enough to know the backup plan," Collins added.

Scientists aren't starting from scratch. Learning to play an instrument, for example, sharpens how the brain processes sound and can improve children's reading and other school skills. Stroke survivors who can't speak sometimes can sing, and music therapy can help them retrain brain pathways to communicate. Similarly, Parkinson's patients sometimes walk better to the right beat.

But what's missing is rigorous science to better understand how either listening to or creating music might improve health in a range of

other ways — research into how the brain processes music that NIH is beginning to fund.

"The water is wide, I cannot cross over," well-known soprano Renee Fleming belted out, not from a concert stage but from inside an MRI machine at the NIH campus.

The opera star — who partnered with Collins to start the Sound Health initiative — spent two hours in the scanner to help researchers tease out what brain activity is key for singing. How? First Fleming spoke the lyrics. Then she sang them. Finally, she imagined singing them.

"We're trying to understand the brain not just so we can address mental disorders or diseases or injuries, but also so we can understand what happens when a brain's working right and what happens when it's performing at a really high level," said NIH researcher David Jangraw, who shared the MRI data with The Associated Press.

To Jangraw's surprise, several brain regions were more active when Fleming imagined singing than when she actually sang, including the brain's emotion center and areas involved with motion and vision.

One theory: it took more mental effort to keep track of where she was in the song, and to maintain its emotion, without auditory feedback.

Fleming put it more simply: "I'm skilled at singing so I didn't have to think about it quite so much," she told a spring workshop at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, where she is an artistic adviser.

Indeed, Jangraw notes a saying in neuroscience: Neurons that fire together, wire together. Brain cells communicate by firing messages to each other through junctions called synapses. Cells that regularly connect — for example, when a musician practices — strengthen bonds into circuitry that forms an efficient network for, in Fleming's case, singing.

But that's a healthy brain. In North Carolina, a neuroscientist and a dance professor are starting an improvisational dance class for Alzheimer's to tell if music and move-

ment enhance a diseased brain's neural networks.

Well before memory loss becomes severe, Alzheimer's patients can experience apathy, depression and gait and balance problems as the brain's synaptic connections begin to falter. The NIH-funded study at Wake Forest University will randomly assign such patients to the improvisation class — to dance playfully without having to remember choreography — or to other interventions.

The test: If quality-of-life symptoms improve, will MRI scans show correlating strengthening of neural networks that govern gait or social engagement?

With senior centers increasingly touting arts programs, "having a deeper understanding of how these things are affecting our biology can help us understand how to leverage resources already in our community," noted Wake Forest lead researcher Christina Hugenschmidt.

Proof may be tough. An international music therapy study failed to significantly help children with autism, the Journal of the American Medical Association recently reported, contradicting earlier promising findings.

But experts cited challenges with the study and called for additional research.

Unlike music therapy, which works one-on-one toward individual outcomes, the arts and humanities program at Georgetown Lombardi Comprehensive Cancer Center lets musicians-in-residence play throughout the hospital. Palliative care nurses often seek Vance, the cellist, for patients anxious or in pain. She may watch monitors, matching a tune's tempo to heart rate and then gradually slowing. Sometimes she plays for the dying, choosing a gently arrhythmic background and never a song that might be familiar.

Julia Langley, who directs Georgetown's program, wants research into the type and dose of music for different health situations: "If we can study the arts in the same way that science studies medication and other therapeutics, I think we will be doing so much good."

Here Are Opportunities To Donate Blood This Week

There will be several opportunities to donate blood in Greene County this week.

Medic Regional Blood Center will host the following blood drives this week:

- Monday, Feb. 12 — Tractor Supply, 1665 E. Andrew Johnson Highway, in Greeneville, from noon until 7 p.m.;

- Tuesday, Feb. 13 — Forward Air, 1915 Snapps Ferry Road, from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m., and

- Thursday, Feb. 15 — Greene County Health Department, 810 W. Church St., from 8 to 11 a.m.

For more information about donating blood with Medic, go online to medicblood.org or call 865-521-2670.

The Kingsport-based Marsh Regional Blood Center will also be collecting blood here this week:

- Friday, Feb. 16 — Greene Technology Center, Hal Henard Road, Greeneville, from 9 a.m. to noon.

In addition to scheduled blood drives, donors are welcome at Marsh Regional's collection centers: 111 W. Stone Drive, Suite 300, Kingsport, 2428 Knob Creek Road, Johnson City and 1996 W. State St., Bristol.

For more information about scheduling a blood drive at a local business, church, school or community organization, please call 423-408-7500, 423-652-0014 or 276-679-4669 or visit www.marshblood.com.

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